



**STATE OF VERMONT
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL**

789 Vermont National Guard Road
Colchester, Vermont 05446-3099

1 May 2019

Governor Philip B. Scott
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Governor Scott:

The Vermont National Guard (VTNG) is proud of its ability to provide State and Federal authorities a ready and reliable force capable of responding to a wide range of military and domestic operations. As part of my campaign for this office I pledged to conduct a full review of our human resource policies and procedures. You can expect a comprehensive report from me no later than 30 September 2019. The current status of this ongoing review is provided here.

Federal law and service regulations to include; Title 5 and 32 of U.S. Code, U. S. Air Force Instructions and U. S. Army Regulations; Air and Army National Guard Instructions and Regulations, Chief National Guard Bureau Instructions and Office of Personnel Management regulation provide oversight, guidance and limits for each of our policies and human resource procedures. As laws, regulations and programs evolve, our policies are continuously assessed for accuracy, legal compliance and relevancy by our program managers. Annually, internal and external programs inspect every level of the VTNG to ensure compliance throughout the organization. These inspections are designed to cover the spectrum of human resource policies and procedures. Of significant focus is disciplinary matters. These specific policies and regulations are very prescriptive and must be followed to ensure they are free of bias and are administered uniformly. As part of this policy review, we will continue to review this area in particular to ensure we are in compliance in all instances, and take corrective action where needed.

In January 2019 the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response office updated the VTNG policy to include; increased command presence and participation during mandatory training events; new mandatory training models to reduce reliance on traditional platforms; and specific efforts to improve communication regarding the frequency of sexual misconduct reports as well as more transparency of accountability

actions following those reports. I have directed my program manager to further revise the policy to include specific language holding bystanders accountable for inaction. The language regarding inaction is also included in the Vermont National Guard wide developmental counseling letter, to be delivered to, and acknowledged by, all of our members by August 15, 2019.

Our policies related to sexual harassment training, reporting and prevention have evolved over recent years to include the reporting of sexually charged comments or gestures that do not rise to the legal threshold of harassment. By tracking these incidents at the state level, program managers can analyze trends and initiate action when multiple reports identify a common subject. With the introduction of Title 5 Federal Civilian employees to our force structure in FY2018, National Guard Bureau is updating Equal Employment, Reasonable Accommodation and Employee Assistance Program policies. To build on these revisions, I have directed my program manager to seek external consultation to ensure all relevant VTNG policies represent industry best practices for promoting inclusion and equal access.

Beginning in FY2019, the VTNG adopted improved business practices for advertising, interviewing and selecting candidates into full time positions for Title 5, Federal Civilian employees. I have directed the Human Resources Office to adopt similar practices for all Title 32 Dual-Status Military Technicians and Active Guard Reserve Service members. Specifically, the interview process will focus on competencies, which facilitates selecting the most qualified candidate for positions, and mitigates potential bias in hiring. This protects the organization, hiring officials, and most importantly, candidates, from questionable hiring practices.

In addition to continuously updating and improving our policies, the VTNG provides specific healthcare related support to our Service members. The Vermont Army National Guard currently employs two Mental Health counselors who provide mental and emotional support services to Soldiers and Families. The 158th Fighter Wing has one full time Mental Health counselor. Additionally, all part time members of the VTNG meet eligibility for TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) health insurance.

All VTNG Service members receive annual dental evaluation and limited treatment through contracted providers. In addition to the annual evaluation, all part-time members meet eligibility for TRICARE Dental Program (United Concordia) insurance.

TRICARE Health and Dental insurance do present the following challenges: TRICARE does not provide an equal access to care in VT. For example, in a recent search for Behavioral Health Councilors, TRICARE provided a list of 77 Providers in the Burlington area. However, further research identified only 1 Provider currently accepting new TRICARE patients. This becomes further complicated by the lack of providers in Vermont who specialize in PTSD or adjustment disorder unique to military service or first responders.

Many Providers do not work with TRICARE for two primary reasons: 1) TRICARE requires an extensive amount of paperwork. Slow processing may prevent a Provider from earning TRICARE credentialing for as long as 3 years. 2) TRICARE reimbursement is not commensurate to cost and is not issued in a timely manner. For example, AllegiantCare will reimburse a dentist \$151 to extract a tooth, TRICARE will only reimburse \$77.71 for the same extraction and may take 10 to 12 months to issue payment.

Although all VTNG Service members qualify for low-cost health and dental insurance, access to providers state-wide remains difficult. This lack of access to care serves as the greatest challenge to the provision of quality healthcare in the VTNG.

Predictably, we are receiving inquiries from the media on this review since it was highlighted during the campaign. After we have discussed this letter personally, I suggest our public affairs teams develop a coordinated plan for the media that is mutually supportive.

Sincerely,

Gregory C. Knight
Brigadier General, VTNG
The Adjutant General